

IRAQI GOVERNANCE REPORT

FEBRUARY 2007

Pilot Issue

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

ANTHONY BORDEN

It is a strange time to be talking about Iraqi democracy, but this is the only way out of the tragedy.

US politics is itself now largely defined by events in a country which are to a great extent out of its control. President George W. Bush's legacy will be played out on the streets of Baghdad, while 2008 presidential contenders from both parties jockey precariously around the shifting developments on the ground.

Within Iraq, the government sends mixed messages - officially committed to a multi-sectarian democracy but unable or unwilling to confront the extremists within their own ranks. At one moment, Iraq and the US are partners; the next Baghdad is castigating US responses and calling for early withdrawal.

Meanwhile, the bloodshed continues.

Whatever one's views on the war, the surge or other policy options, the only real solution is a functioning, representative and accountable Iraqi government taking control of the country's affairs.

If there is to be any hope, politicians in Iraq - both in the centre and crucially in the provinces - must demonstrate leadership and be answerable to the people when they fail.

For this to happen, transparency is an absolute necessity. Supported by the International Republican Institute and the US Department of State, IWPR's Iraqi Governance Reporting Project seeks to make a vital contribution by building up a network of trained local reporters in key provinces around the country to report on local administration, collaborate with provincial civil society groups, and strengthen information and debate about good governance.

This newsletter is a pilot edition with leading Iraqi personalities providing personal perspectives on the subject. Subsequent editions will focus on detailed reporting, tracking key indicators of effective administration and functioning accountability.

It is a dangerous but essential task, for if there are any positive options, this is where they will be found.

Anthony Borden is IWPR Executive Director.

HOLDING THE GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT

Without a leadership ready to move beyond sectarian politics, nothing is possible, least of all the defeat of the insurgency.

KANAN MAKIYA

To understand the depths of the abyss that Iraq is about to fall into, one must begin with the mistakes and miscalculations made by the Coalition forces, led by the United States - particularly in underestimating the number of troops necessary for the occupation.

From the first day of liberation, April 9, 2003, security could not be delivered - as evidenced by the looting. And without security, democracy and the rule of law are rendered meaningless.

Yet these errors mainly relate to the first year of the transition from the Ba'ath regime. Since June 2004, Iraq has been run by Iraqis, and responsibility for escalating sectarian violence, and the catastrophic position the country finds itself in today, no longer falls on the Coalition; it falls on the new Iraqi political elite created by the ouster of the dictatorship.

Both the Coalition and the Iraqi government constantly emphasise that the focus now is - or ought to be - on defeating the insurgency. But this is no longer - if it ever was - the central question of Iraqi politics. Lacking a programme, policy or any viable political alternative, the insurgency is bound to fail in the long run, even if it takes years.

The prospect of either al-Qaeda or a metamorphosed version of the Ba'ath party ever ruling Iraq is still, at this late point, a fantasy. The real priority - and the necessary precondition for the defeat of the insurgency - remains what it has been from the day after the fall of the Ba'ath: a functioning and accountable central Iraqi government.

Without that, without a leadership ready to move beyond sectarian politics and represent the country as a whole, nothing is possible, least of all the defeat of the insurgency.

>

INSIDE

page

THE NEED FOR A CULTURE OF JUSTICE BAKHTYAR AMIN	3
WHEN WARRIORS BECOME POLITICIANS TWANA OSMAN	5
BACKSLIDING ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION REND RAHIM	6
JOURNALISTS SEEN AS ENEMIES LUUAI MAJEED HASSAN	8
GOVERNANCE REPORTING CHRISTOPH REUTER & SUSANNE FISCHER	9

FEBRUARY 2007

The inability of the Shia-led government to distance itself from the militias of its own constituent members and their sympathisers, and to lead a genuinely all-Iraqi government that can be trusted by all Iraqis, has become the main obstacle to defeating the insurgency and restoring security and public services to the people of Iraq. The militias are a scourge that have to be purged from all government institutions, especially the interior ministry and the armed forces.

This might have seemed obvious to the great beneficiaries of the 2003 Iraq war - the Kurdish and Shia elite that today control the very state power that is daily undermined by their own militias. However, the performance on the ground has been very disappointing.

Consider, for instance, the botched trial and execution of Saddam Hussein.

The design for the trial that was put in place during the time of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and the assumptions made by American officials before the transfer of sovereignty in June of 2004, encouraged an ethnic and confessional way of looking at and adjudicating the criminality of the former Iraqi regime.

These came to a head in the manner of the execution itself, beginning with the apparent lack of control exhibited in the very execution chamber with Shia guards - militia members not government officials - taunting the former dictator. After all, as has been observed by many commentators, if a government cannot control a gallows chamber containing 20 people, how can it hope to manage a country caught up in the throes of sectarian war?

Then there is the larger issue of the rush to execution after Saddam's conviction only on the basis of the Dujail trial.

The Dujail judgment hinged on the execution of 148 people in the town of al-Dujail, following an attempt on Saddam Hussein's life in 1982. But what about all the other trials that have yet to take place, say for the nearly 200,000 Kurds killed in the Anfal campaign of 1987-88? Or the 1.5 million Iraqis who have in one way or another died violently through the wars and repressive actions of the regime since 1968. What about their right to accountability and a sense of justice?

This was a dictator who directed his violence at Iraqis of all walks of life and from all ethnic and religious communities.

The execution of Saddam for only the al-Dujail atrocity has diminished the scale of the former president's crimes, instead of enhancing them. And in so doing the government that insisted on rushing the execution has also diminished itself.

In the end Saddam did not appear to have been executed because of his record of genocide, extreme repression and waging wars on other countries, but out of motives of revenge. And so the impossible has been achieved: Saddam Hussein, a dictator comparable to the greatest tyrants of the 20th century, has begun to re-emerge as a kind of hero in parts of the Arab world.

The mismanagement of the execution epitomizes the sectarianism and narrow-mindedness of the new Iraqi political elite put in power by the American-led coalition.

The Iraqi people who emerged from under the blanket of Saddam's brutal regime are today an unknown quantity. To be sure, the millions of men and women who took their lives in their hands as they went out to vote in the historic January 2005 elections behaved heroically in a way that it is difficult for people like us who have not been subjected to such abuse and intimidation over 30 years to understand. Because of their liberation from tyranny in 2003, they began to take their lives into their own hands and act on what had been done to them. And that is a good thing; it is after all what politics in its best sense is all about.

But they are also victims. What had been done to them over decades was not erased overnight. In spite of what so much of modern Arab culture has been trying to persuade us of in recent years, there is no virtue in being a victim; it is a terrible condition, not a great and uplifting quality. It takes decades if not generations to come to terms with such victim-hood. Iraqis have yet to reconcile this terrible legacy, or affliction, with the political attributes of citizenship in a new Iraq.

Given this legacy, a special responsibility fell upon those Iraqis who were going to lead them in the transitional period.

The lesson of the politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict of the last several decades is that a leadership that elevates victim-hood into the be-all and end-all of politics brings untold suffering and misery upon its own people. Given political power, this kind of a leadership will in turn victimise, as a whole body of knowledge in sociology, political psychology and history will confirm.

Even the insurgents in Iraq fully understand this dynamic; in fact they have been counting on it. That is why their goal was never to win over Iraqi hearts and minds; it was - and continues to be - to inculcate a state of pervasive physical insecurity conducive to the eruption of the most irrational forms of behaviour.

There is a politics of fear and intimidation borrowed from that of the former regime which produced them, and it is a politics designed to create a backlash among those very Iraqis who in 2005 so magnificently wore the blue-black stain on their right index finger as a badge of honour as they braved the bombs to go out and vote.

Since 1968, the Ba'ath have been trashing the only idea that can hold the great social diversity of Iraq together: the idea of Iraq. Their answer to the question "Who am I?" was: you are either one of us, or you are dead.

True to their word, they killed anyone who dared to say he was a Kurd or a Shia or a leftist, or a democrat or a liberal.

Contrary to what Iraqi Shia leaders tend to argue nowadays, the Ba'ath never wanted to build a Sunni confessional state in Iraq. Anti-Shia sectarianism was introduced on a mass scale only after the uprising of 1991. The state that the Ba'ath built in Iraq up until the 1991 Gulf war was in fact worse than sectarian. It thrived on the distrust, suspicion and fear that it went about inducing in everyone.

In this sense it was consistently egalitarian. Atomising society by breeding hate and a thirst for revenge was the regime's highest

FEBRUARY 2007

ambition and principal tool of social control. Every Iraqi Kurd or Arab, Muslim or Christian, Shia or Sunni became both complicit in the Ba'athist enterprise and its victim at the same time.

Once the Shias became the majority in the Iraqi National Assembly, and began to run the government, they inherited this great burden of a fractured and deeply atomised country filled with minorities, all of whom have known suffering of one sort or another. How they shouldered that responsibility was going to determine the course of politics in Iraq.

The paradox is that the idea of Iraq as a pluralist and accommodating whole is at odds with the Shia sense of political entitlement arising from their own previous suffering. The most fundamental truth of post-Saddam politics in Iraq is that only the Shia can stop the current destruction that is the legacy of dictatorship. By virtue of their numbers, the Shia in the first place carry the greatest responsibility for this transition period, more so than any other ethnic or sectarian group in Iraq.

They also have far more to lose than anyone else, and this too is a lesson the insurgents have understood well. That is why they are targeting Shia, and blowing up mosques, like the Askariyya in Samarra, that are very dear to the Shia.

The fact that Iraqis are still competing with each other over who has suffered the most, and who did or did not collaborate with

Saddam, is a sign that whatever Saddam's fate, what he represented still lives on inside Iraqi hearts. Herein lies the greatest danger of all for Iraq's future.

Politics, it has been said, is the art of possible. But that is only so when there is a large vision of the future - one bigger than one's own self-interest - guiding the practitioners of this art.

In the case of the big beneficiary of the Iraq war - the Shia elite empowered by the 2005 elections - visionary leadership has been totally absent. The result is a Shia-led government that is itself a part of the problem and not the solution to the crisis of Iraq.

At the end of the day, it is the poor, impoverished and disenfranchised Shia of Iraq - nearly 60 per cent of the population - who will pay the biggest price for the failure of all those politicians who claim to speak in their name. The failure of the Shia leadership in Iraq, duly elected and wholly legitimate, has already begun to unleash dark forces. Unless that leadership can adopt a broader vision, and accept a deeper accountability, the country we all fought so hard to liberate is today heading for dark and unpredictable times.

Kanan Makiya is a professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Brandeis University; founder of the Iraq Memory Foundation; and author of *The Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*, among other works.



THE NEED FOR A CULTURE OF JUSTICE

Important steps have been taken, but the Iraqi authorities must place a higher priority on confronting impunity and professionalising its approach to human rights.

BAKHTYAR AMIN

Accountability is not strong in Iraqi society. Words like transparency and good governance are simply non-existent in our political dictionary. The culture of human rights is the culture of justice, but creating this environment is going to take time.

The legacy of three and a half decades of dictatorship is severe. Over several wars and genocides, and the most brutal internal repression, 2 million people were killed, 1.5 million disabled, 1.5 million internally displaced and 3 million made refugees.

Personal security and savings were devastated. While a small sector of society flourished, hundreds of thousands of wives became widows, and countless numbers were impoverished, with tens of thousands of people becoming homeless.

It is simply not possible to change that culture of human treatment overnight. In the struggle to find justice for these millions of

victims, it is unfortunate but inevitable that vengeance and vendetta will take place.

The execution of the former president is the most obvious case in point.

As a human rights activist, I have fought all my life against the death penalty. I was the only minister in the cabinet at the time of the creation of the Special Tribunal who did not sign on the reinstitution of the death penalty. My position has always been clear.

Yet Saddam Hussein paid the price for what he did. The government introduced the ultimate sanction with popular support, and it was carried out. However rough the justice, this is the example of accountability in the extreme.

The process through which it took place was unfortunate. Saddam's trial and treatment should have been better, but they

FEBRUARY 2007

were a big step up from what he meted out to others. Indeed, he was executed in the very same room where he held executions, twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, for decades. Families often did not receive the bodies of their loved ones and were not allowed to mourn. Where guns were used, invoices were sent to the bereaved for the bullets.

Europe should also reflect on its own past. Commentators and human rights groups from the West have criticised the hanging and said that in its demonstration of brutality the current government is likened to the regime it has replaced. But Europe, now a proud champion against the death penalty, only abolished the practice itself relatively recently.

And for decades the world community was silent as Saddam executed our loved ones.

This is not to make excuses, but to introduce a sense of understanding. In fact, despite the chaotic situation, and the images of bloodshed, violence and terrorism, I see reasons for hope. Significant steps have been taken, and we hope they are not in vain.

There are the obvious events, particularly several elections resulting in a representative government. We have also produced a constitution - hardly perfect but completed in a very short timeframe.

In a country where no independent institutions and no civil society existed, the judiciary is formally independent and finding its feet. We have a public integrity commission and a supreme audit board. We have introduced the office of the inspector general and, the position I held, a minister for human rights. All of these institutions have a huge need for training and modernisation. But the process has begun.

Freedom of expression is also enshrined in the constitution. The explosion of broadcast and print media, including satellite television, news agencies and websites, may appear chaotic, and the quality needs to improve. But after decades of total state control, this access to information, especially the internet, is a revolution in the mindset of Iraqis.

Under Saddam, you could be executed for having a Thuraya satellite phone. Now millions of Iraqis have their own computers and are online. Mobile phones are everywhere, and satellite dishes have mushroomed. The exposure of Iraqis to the thousands and thousands of foreign civil servants in the country is also opening minds and teaching new approaches.

Of the 18 governorates or provinces in Iraq, five or six are in an extremely bad situation. This is to be deplored. But it also means that the remaining dozen, while beset with problems, are relatively stable. The Kurdish areas are more secure even than Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

During my time in the transitional government, we built a ministry from scratch and tried to make a real difference in human rights. For example, we established a monitoring group of 20 people with

the right to go to any prison, without the need to give advance warning, to inspect conditions and the treatment of inmates - and make improvements. It was a modest start but an important one.

Many mistakes were made, however. There are people with the old mentality, especially in bureaucratic areas essential to government. They are dinosaurs, working with old techniques and old ideas, and unresponsive to fresh energy and new concepts. They undermine the process of change.

The international community is also responsible. It does not have a rapid justice response mechanism, so everything takes too long and is overcome by events.

From my perspective, I would cite three main areas of insufficient progress: the failure to initiate the special tribunal quickly enough and with enough consideration for procedures and support for its work; the failure to establish a truth and reconciliation commission and learn the lessons from South Africa and other transitional societies; and the failure to launch a serious national dialogue campaign to engage all communities throughout the country.

The legacies of these failings will clearly be with us for a long time. Due to a sustained and systematic attack on the country, Iraq is experiencing a period of extreme violence and human rights have seen an enormous regression. People are in peril, and when they go off to their schools, jobs or shops, they do not know whether they will come back.

In this everyone has been affected, from government officials, judges and journalists to academics and doctors, to activists and professionals, to barbers and bakers. In the worst areas, everyone is now at risk, and we are talking not just about human rights, but also about the primordial right to life.

Security is essential but I believe that if the government had spent 20 per cent of those funds on the social welfare of the people, the country would be much more stable. An investment in poverty reduction and employment would be more cost-effective than only barbed wire, walls and barriers.

Beyond that, if the government wants to honour the victims of the past regime, and those who have suffered now, it should recommit itself to international standards of human rights, and demonstrate that the people's suffering will be met with justice not just power struggles.

This should include continuing the process of professionalising human rights mechanisms, in particular removing the human rights ministry from any party control and ensuring that it is in the hands of a credible and truly independent personality.

The priority is to demonstrate opposition to any torture, kidnapping or killing - whoever may be the culprit - and to replace the culture of impunity with a culture of justice. But it will not happen overnight.

Bakhtyar Amin was formerly the minister for human rights in the Iraqi transitional government.



FEBRUARY 2007

WHEN WARRIORS BECOME POLITICIANS

Real democracy in the Kurdish regions will only emerge when the criteria for leadership becomes accountability and competence rather than years of military service.

TWANA OSMAN

Before the Kuwait war, the Kurdish struggle was led by the warriors in the mountains, the Peshmerga guerrilla fighters.

After the 1991 uprising and the establishment of the Kurdish autonomous area in Iraq, the Kurds elected a council of representatives and established a Kurdish government. It was then that the problems started, when the warriors became politicians.

Usually when there is a revolution, a military takeover or coup d'état, at some point the warriors step aside and allow the politicians, the experts and the technicians to run the country. You need people with political and bureaucratic experience.

But in Iraqi Kurdistan, the field commanders from the mountains took all the important positions in government, from the prime minister and speaker of the parliament down to director generals of industries.

Even to this day, every Iraqi Kurd in a key position, from the president of the country on down, was in some way associated with the fighters from the hills.

The post-uprising generation, those who were five- and ten-years-old in 1991 and are now in their 20s and 30s, are almost entirely excluded from any position of importance. They were not Peshmerga.

Once I was interviewing the deputy prime minister in the Suleimaniyah administration and I raised a sensitive issue. He said to me bluntly, "You weren't a Peshmerga, you didn't fight, you have no right to discuss this with me."

This is their mentality. They have and keep all of the privileges, and will not allow anyone to compete with them.

It is as if Iraqi Kurdistan is a limited company and whoever was a Peshmerga has shares in the company equal to the time he spent as a warrior. A year with the Peshmerga is equal to 20 years of normal activity.

We now have a parliament and the only legitimacy should be legal and constitutional. That is the basis of accountability and good governance.

But the elite in Kurdistan today rely on revolutionary legitimacy. And that, in the end, means the ones with the guns call the shots.

They are the ones, they always insist on reminding you, who kicked out Saddam in 1991. Of course this kind of revolutionary

legitimacy paralyses the logic of a legal legitimacy and the rule of law. It impedes democracy.

There are positive signs that social developments, including the media environment and social movements, are prompting the beginning of a change.

There is a huge amount of criticism now towards the Kurdish government, both in the media and on the street. Everyone is participating. The core of this criticism is that the main political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, have to change the way they are running the government.

But at the same time, the poor security situation in the rest of Iraq is having an impact in the Kurdish region. It only encourages Kurdish officials to boast about their security stronghold. Before the fall of Saddam Hussein, they used his existence as a reason for not undertaking democratic reforms. Now it is terrorism.

The only winners of all this are the political parties, the PUK and the KDP. They have the approval of both the Americans and the Iraqi governments, and put every obstacle they can in the way of transition and democratic reforms.

The Peshmerga in fact have only been formalised as the Kurdish military. They use central government funds to strengthen their position and the whole security apparatus. The salary of a Peshmerga is three times that of a university graduate, and as a result thousands of young people, professionals and people from small businesses are signing up, continuing the militarisation of society.

All of this is used to put pressure on dissent.

In June 2006, there were demonstrations in many cities in the Kurdish region over the lack of services, especially electricity.

There are now only two hours of electricity a day, and when a new electricity feeder was put into place, the lines went directly to the home towns of the two main leaders, Iraqi president Jalal Talabini and president of the autonomous Kurdish government Massoud Barzani.

But when people tried to gather to raise pressure over public services, the Peshmerga intervened and sent them home.

It is forbidden to hold a demonstration without getting approval first, and in some areas the Peshmerga the night before surrounded the gathering places to prevent people from holding their actions.

FEBRUARY 2007

In Halabja, they resorted to force. Two people were killed, more than 20 injured and 200 arrested. Of these, two of the arrested and ten of the wounded were Hawlati correspondents.

Such events do show that there is a popular desire for change. But the institutional base for this is very small. The media is one pressure point. But otherwise, real civil society is chaotic and disorganised. In fact, the two parties almost completely control the non-governmental organisations and civil society groups in the region, and dominate the main broadcast media outlets.

As a result, change can only come from within the parties for now, and they are trying to reform internally – to ensure that no popular reform movement can gain momentum.

An improvement in the security situation in the rest of Iraq would be important, as it would remove the Kurdish parties' false excuse for continuing their political control. The continuing influx of people from the rest of Iraq is also driving inflation, increasing the pressure on housing and creating other problems.

The Americans could put more pressure on the parties. So far, unfortunately, the US has maintained relations only with the party elite and is not in touch with the grassroots. Unlike in the rest of Iraq, they haven't really made a serious effort to support the media and civil society in the Kurdish region.

The new American discourse - emphasising strong government over democratic government, talking more about a stable Iraq than a diverse Iraq - seems only to underline this approach.

Just because the Kurdish region is stable, the Americans seem to behave as if it is a fully established democracy with no problems. We will not have a real democracy in the Kurdish area until we move beyond revolutionary legitimacy and make the criteria for leadership accountability and competence rather than years of military service.

Twana Osman is editor-in-chief of the Suleimaniyah-based newspaper Hawlati.



BACKSLIDING ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The cornerstone of good governance is open information so that citizens can hold their government to account.

REND RAHIM

Elections are important, but they are not the definition of democracy. Parliaments are essential and so is an independent judiciary. Yet to me, the real meaning of democracy is accountability and responsibility, and despite all the difficulties, Iraq must continue down that path.

The main problem with Saddam Hussein was that he was responsible to no one. That single factor led to all the tragedies which ensued, and to the destruction of our country.

Now we must build a culture of accountability, and the starting point for that is information. The only way that government can be accountable to the people is when they know what it is up to.

In 2003, after the fall of Saddam, the doors were opened wide and reliable information became accessible. People could find out about orders issued by the Coalition Provisional Authority. The 2004 budget was published, and it was possible to find out how much each ministry was going to be allocated. This was a level of information that the Iraqi people had never experienced before.

Now, despite elections and referendums, Iraq has actually taken a step backwards from the transparency it enjoyed then.

As government and bureaucracy have solidified, we have reverted to old ways and the old system, and there is no longer any real information.

The explanation for this backsliding is simple: governments everywhere have a tendency to close up unless they are under pressure to disclose and cooperate. Iraq is not unusual in this, except that we move more quickly in this direction because of our history of autocracy.

We are rushing back towards secrecy, and as a member of the public I can no longer go and find things out. And what I do not know, I cannot challenge. I cannot hold the government responsible.

This is why the media and the broader civil society are so fundamental. As a member of the public, the press is my spokesperson; it is my voice. Without a strong civil society operating through robust institutions, it is inevitable that any government will become authoritarian.

For the media to become an effective pillar of democracy, for it to serve as a true fourth estate that challenges, requires four main things.

First and foremost, of course, is the courage of media professionals. The death of so many journalists over the past three years has been a tragedy, but they are also heroes. They are dealing in dangerous matters by holding up the light of accountability, and in these days such courage is essential.

FEBRUARY 2007

Second, the constitution guarantees freedom of the press, but this has yet to be backed up by a law passed by parliament. This is a priority, and it is essential that the drafting of such a law be undertaken with substantial involvement of the media and media law experts.

Third, the mechanisms that regulate the media must be independent of government. Neither government nor parliament must supervise and regulate the media. Whatever mechanisms are required must be vested in an authority designed in such a way that it is structurally and practically independent, and that it remains independent.

Fourth and finally, Iraq must adopt a freedom of information act. There must be a legal framework to give the public, and their representatives in civil society and the media, the right to know what government is doing and to review documents generated by the whole of the administration – government, parliament and the judiciary. Jordan is working on plans to do the same, so Iraq would not be unique in the Arab world if it introduced such an act.

There will inevitably be a difference between the mere existence of an act and its actual implementation. Government may also create many restrictions so that rights to access information are gravely weakened. But the first thing is to establish the principle so you can then argue over the exceptions. Until then, you have nothing.

The next priority is to ensure that information itself is processed in a more professional manner. Before a citizen can get information from the government, the executive has to assemble the facts it is going to give out.

At present this is not happening. The Iraqi government is not maintaining data in an organised way and it is not accumulating knowledge.

We have had new ministries for three years now, but they remain ignorant of what is happening in the country. Ask the ministry of industry how many companies were set up or how much was invested over the past year, and they won't know. Ministry websites are a disaster: not only do they contain rubbish, but it is rubbish that has not been updated for a year.

When politicians are asked questions by the media, they perceive it as offensive or at least intrusive, rather than as a normal and positive part of the process of accountability.

An American official recently joked to me that after two years in Iraq, he longed for bureaucracy. Just imagine. What he meant was that there is no such thing in Iraq as a civil service or procedures.

Systems for gathering data need to be put in place. As the interface with the public, spokespersons for all levels of government need to be appointed, and they must be made to understand that their job is in fact to provide rather than hide information. That would be a real breakthrough.

Resolving the relationship between central government and the

regions is also important, not only at the level of power and politics, but also in terms of accountability and information.

If the central Iraq authorities are to take charge of the country, they must administer the regions effectively, and that means responsibility and transparency at a local level, too.

This will be a special challenge. No one in government willingly gives out information, and when it comes to smaller institutions of governance, where there is less public pressure and personal relationships are stronger, there may be even less instinct to disclose information.

But regional governments will themselves be seeking information. If central government shares information with the regional administrations, they may join in withholding information from the public – in a kind of conspiracy of silence.

If, however, the central authorities withhold information from provincial governments, the latter may become allies of the public in pressing for freedom of information. It is a strange, Iraqi paradox.

There is so much cynicism and the security situation is so bad that this may seem an odd time to be speaking about accountability or even democracy.

But we must have hope, and I do. In fact, speaking about democracy is now more important than ever.

Even amid the insurgency and terrorism, people need to feel that the government is not at war with them. They need to have a sense that government is about more than just power, but is an institution that is actually trying to serve them.

It is far better to win people over than to alienate them, and the best way to build loyalty and allegiance is when people feel the government is answerable to them.

Of course, some will cite the usual excuses - we are at war. Saddam did this all the time. The whole of the Arab world does this. We can't have democracy because we are in a state of war; we cannot have elections; we cannot have freedom of information and the press.

But we have been at war for decades, and it has been long enough.

Accountability will not come after our problems have been solved. Instead, it is one of the preconditions that will set us on the road to democracy and ultimately peace.

Rend Rahim is executive director of the Iraq Foundation.



FEBRUARY 2007

JOURNALISTS SEEN AS ENEMIES

Ministries move beyond press releases to provide the media with tailor-made stories - but it is still propaganda.

LUUAI MAJEED HASSAN

In December, people in Iraq did not receive their monthly ration of flour, and everyone was unhappy. So in January the Ministry of Commerce wanted to please the public, and decided to do so through the media.

The ministry provided reporters with a pre-written, complete article, rather than just a press release. The idea was that reporters would just add their by-line and publish it as if it was their own.

We never publish pre-written stories. But in this case, the article was announcing an increase in the flour ration. That would certainly make people happy, and as the editor of al-Moutamar, I thought it was an important issue.

But I wanted to know two things. First, I wanted a proper source, someone with authority in the ministry who would put their name to the announcement. There was no source in the story they provided.

I also wanted to know by how much the ration was going to increase, how much it was going to cost, and whether the ministry's budget could afford it. None of this information was provided in the article.

No one at the ministry would respond to our inquiries. It turns out the story was just propaganda. There wasn't any real information there to work with, so we spiked it.

In Iraq, this kind of thing happens all the time. As a rule, officials have no understanding of the role of the press and treat journalists as the enemy.

But at least at national level, ministers and senior officials sometimes speak to the press, so you can get some information.

At the local level, the situation is much more difficult. When local government officials talk to the press, they always demand that you publish any information they give you exactly as they provided it – using the same order, format and context.

If you do not do this, you will be banned from entering the particular office concerned, or even from the entire building. In effect, you will be boycotted.

Should you decide to publish nothing at all, officials will think that you are plotting against them and are conspiring with their enemies.

Frequently, local officials use the media as a vehicle to promote their own position. They try to impose news of their activities on reporters, and tell them exactly what to write. But most of the time, the information they provide is untrue. This happens all over the country, in every governorate.

Before elections or ahead of a big meeting, officials will summon journalists to a press conference to give them their views. However, certain journalists will be singled out for special treatment - they will be given gifts, including even laptops, as long as they write what officials want. Sometimes officials offer more direct bribes.

Al-Moutamer is in a good position because we have commercial revenue, and officials need us more than we need them. I teach my reporters how to establish direct relationships with a number of sources within each institution. They play these sources against each other in order to get as much information as possible, and try to reach the truth that way.

Spokesmen get very angry if we go around them and speak directly to people inside the official agencies. But if our reporters get harassed, I never call up and beg officials to treat them nicely. Instead, we just say OK - and we boycott those officials in return. In extreme cases, I may speak to the editors of other papers, and we can coordinate our actions.

If officials don't want us to cover their news, it's their loss.

On many occasions, reporters stumble across dangerous information, for example in corruption cases. We do receive physical threats, but even when we don't, we still have to apply a degree of self-censorship, watering down the full extent of what we know in order to protect our journalists.

My newspaper was the first to publish documents concerning corruption in the defence and electricity ministries two years ago.

Shortly afterwards, I received threatening phone calls from anonymous callers. "The information you are publishing is inaccurate and it will create a lot of trouble for you if you don't stop," they told us.

I found a way to respond to this. "Fine, I agree," I would say to them. "I'll take your word for it. Just send us the correct information and we will print a correction." But they never sent anything.

The perspectives of officials, especially at local level, haven't really changed since Saddam's time.

What has changed is that journalists now have the freedom to write what they want. The minister hasn't changed, but the journalist has. That is the key. If I am not afraid of an official even when he threatens me, then I can write about him freely.

Luuai Majeed Hassan is editor in chief of the Baghdad-based daily newspaper al-Moutamar.



FEBRUARY 2007

GOVERNANCE REPORTING: IWPR LAUNCHES TRAINING

Iraqi journalists complete eight-day IWPR workshop on investigative training skills, preparing them for a new reporting project which aims to put a spotlight on local government.

CHRISTOPH REUTER and SUSANNE FISCHER

The journey to Sulaimaniyah was a perilous expedition: at a bogus checkpoint on the road to the north, four trainees from Baghdad had to watch as two men were killed 50 metres in front of them. Others had to wait hours for the road to be reopened after an attack.

They came from Baghdad, Basra, Kerbala, Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil and other cities across Iraq, and in the end all arrived safely: 20 experienced young reporters participated in the first workshop in a new project on governance and investigative reporting by the Institute for War & Peace Reporting.

The objective of the class: in-depth research. The trainees would learn how to gather complex information on topics of good governance, to be able to fulfil the crucial task of the media as a watchdog of the powerful. It is a task that is rather new to the Iraqi media and at the same time becoming increasingly dangerous for Iraqi journalists. At a time when the country is cleaving more and more along ethnic and confessional divides, it carries particular risks for a journalist to reach outside his or her own community or group.

Because of the perils for journalists, less and less accurate information is available about what really happens in Iraq. Good governance needs facts; it needs transparency.

How can the government tackle the worsening security situation if nobody really knows who is causing it? Who is behind the death squads that carry out ethnic killings in Baghdad? Why are the police and the Iraqi army not capable of improving the security situation? Who is really in charge in the different neighbourhoods and cities? Why are public services in such a poor state in many places; and why do Iraqis still only have two or three hours of electricity per day?

Any government plan to stem the violence or to improve services must be based on the utmost accurate information. But this is increasingly in short supply - at least for the public.

IWPR works to enhance the capability of local reporters and researchers to acquire more detailed information about the background of events in Iraq - not to compete with news agencies, but to explain what is behind the news. Operating in Iraq since September 2003, IWPR has trained around 500 journalists who are today working all over the country in regional and national newspapers, TV and radio stations. Many of them continue to contribute to the IWPR website, providing a rare insight into

events in Iraq. Over the course of three years, they have gained considerable expertise and knowledge.

Out of this pool, the 20 best were chosen to participate in IWPR's new Governance Reporting Project, which is funded by IRI. Over eight long days, they learned sophisticated journalistic skills that will help them to uncover the hidden truth. In role-plays, they practiced the art of interviewing an evasive politician; in hands-on exercises they learned how to plan and carry out complex research with the aim of maximising the results of the research while minimising the danger for the reporter. Historical examples of outstanding investigative reporting served as a guideline.

Before the trainees returned home, we conducted a thorough debate about the situation in five key governorates of the country. Task groups were formed to produce extensive, probing reports on governance in the provinces of Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk and Erbil.

Over the course of the coming months, the reporters will produce dozens of meticulously researched stories about crucial topics from all over the country. The goal is to provide an unprecedented overview of the reality in Iraq in the fields of security, public services, oil production, health and education and the media. Training, mentoring and other support will continue.

The ultimate objective is to facilitate the emergence of a new generation of independent, well-trained journalists in Iraq, able to fulfil the media's role as a public watchdog. This is dangerous business, and the reporters - and IWPR as their mentor and supporter - see the task as a formidable challenge. But it is an urgent and essential one, to support the fledgling democracy in the face of the threats of anarchy and sectarianism.

Christoph Reuter, a reporter from the German magazine Stern, conducted IWPR's training in Sulaimaniyah. Susanne Fischer is IWPR's Iraq country director.





The Institute for War & Peace Reporting is an international not-for-profit organization supporting peace and democracy through free and fair media.

It operates reporting, training and capacity-building programmes in two dozen countries and territories, and has undertaken extensive programming in Iraq since 2003.

The Iraq Governance Reporting Project is supported by the International Republican Institute, to which IWPR extends thanks.

For further information contact Iraq Programme Director Ammar Al-Shahbander: ammar@iwpr.net



IWPR-US is registered in Washington, DC, as an organization with tax-exempt status under section 501 (c)(3).

IWPR-US
1325 G Street NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC
20005
+1 (202) 449-7663

IWPR-Europe is a charity registered in England and Wales.

IWPR-EUROPE
48 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8LT
+4420 7831 1030

IWPR-Africa is a Section 21 not-for-profit organization registered in Johannesburg.

IWPR-AFRICA
PO Box 3317
Parklands
Johannesburg 2121



The opinions expressed in Iraqi Governance Report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting.

2007 © Institute for War & Peace Reporting